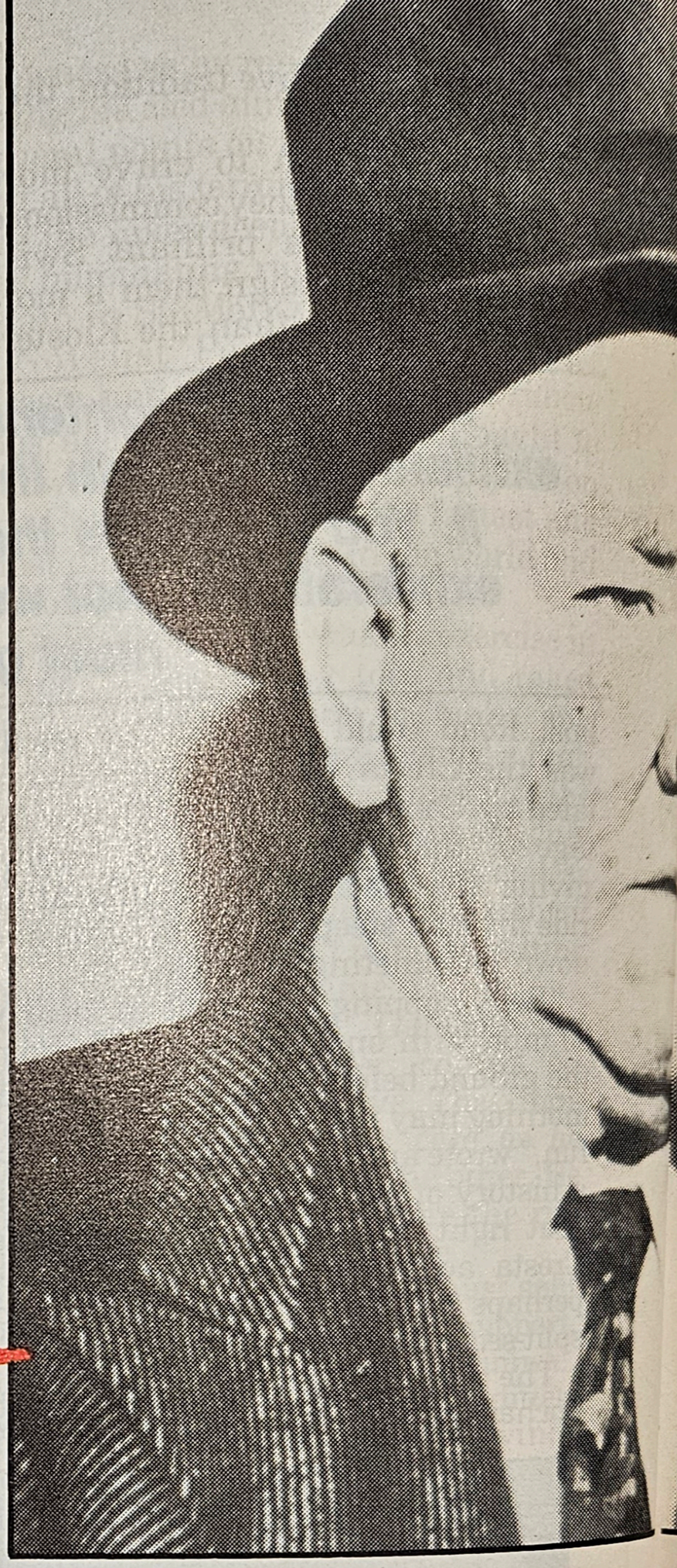
LOOK BACK IN *Anger*



By Dale Ashmun

For those of you who want your Tinseltown dirt dished up steaming hot, Kenneth Anger has written a sequel to his infamous* Hollywood Babylon, *logically titled* Hollywood Babylon II *(Dutton Books). You can't miss it in the bookstores—it's the hefty volume with a radiantly porcine Liz Taylor staring you in the eye as if you were a piece of Dutch chocolate cheesecake.

The original* Hollywood Babylon *was first published during the '60s in Paris but wasn't unleashed on America until 1975. Fans of that book are familiar with Anger's style—reams of incredible stills of the stars at their worst accompanied by a breezy, bitchy narrative that goes for the groin.

Anger, born in Santa Monica, first gained notoriety as a film maker. His work includes cult attractions such as* Fireworks, Scorpio Rising *and his work in progress,* Lucifer Rising *starring Marianne Faithful.

OUI visited Kenneth Anger shortly after the publication of* Hollywood Babylon II. *He resides on New York's Upper East Side in an elegant rent-controlled apartment ($190 per month), a museum of Hollywood memorabilia.

OUI: Tell me how your association with Henri Langlois (director of the world's largest film collection and museum, La Cinematheque Francaise) came about?

Anger: Well, he heard that this teenager had made some films, and was making avant garde films with a 16mm camera. Before I arrived in France in 1950, one of my early films, *Fireworks,* won a prize at the Biaritz Film Festival. The prize was awarded by Jean Cocteau and Henri was there. In other words, Henri saw one of my films before he met me. We started corresponding and he invited me to show some of my other films at the Cinematheque. So I literally arrived with my films in a knapsack on the wonderful De Grasse, which was one of the flagships of the French Line.

OUI: Were you always collecting movie memorabilia while you travelled?

Anger: When I could I did. One of the spy missions I did make for Henri Langlois was to Czechoslo-

vakia, where in the state archives they have one of the world's largest collection of vintage black and white pornography. It came from Hedy Lamarr's first husband's collection, which was seized by the state. His name was Fritz Mondell. Her name at the time was Hedy Keisler, one of the most beautiful creatures on the earth; in fact, she was considered the most beautiful woman, period, of the 1930s. Louis B. Mayer changed her name to Hedy Lamarr in honor of a girl she used to love, in vain, in the 1920s. Barbara Lamarr, who died of drug addiction. She's in my first *Hollywood Babylon* book.

OUI: Did you gain access to the pornography collection?

Anger: Yes, I confirmed that they did exist. The curator showed me about 16 hours worth of films, particularly Nadar films. He was making stag movies or "le film os'e" in the 1920s using high class prostitutes and gigolos as the cast. Nadar was caught doing this. He was a wealthy man, an aristocrat, but he also ran several brothels. But he was caught—in other words, even in France it was against the law and exporting these films abroad was against the law. So he was caught, and rather than go to trial he committed suicide. He shot himself in the head. It's a very dramatic story and the legend of Nadar pornography is one of the basic legends of the liberated screen, because the French government tried to destroy all the copies. But copies do survive in the Czechoslovakian Film Archive, and in spite of the Communist dictatorship, they have not been destroyed. They're not shown publicly, however.

OUI: Looking at this still in the book of your part in *A Midsummer's Night Dream* (Anger had a walk-on role as the Changling Prince) I wondered if you had any memories of Mickey Rooney or James Cagney on the set?

Anger: I was a very young kid and Mickey Rooney was 12. While we were on the Warner Brother's lot in Burbank Mickey took me on a tour. When we went to the prop room, we saw hanging in one part of the room Busby Berkeley's props and these included 60 neon violins, from *Golddiggers of 1933*. In the old days they used to save everything, because they thought they might use it again in another movie. They had these huge warehouses full of accessories, hand props, props,

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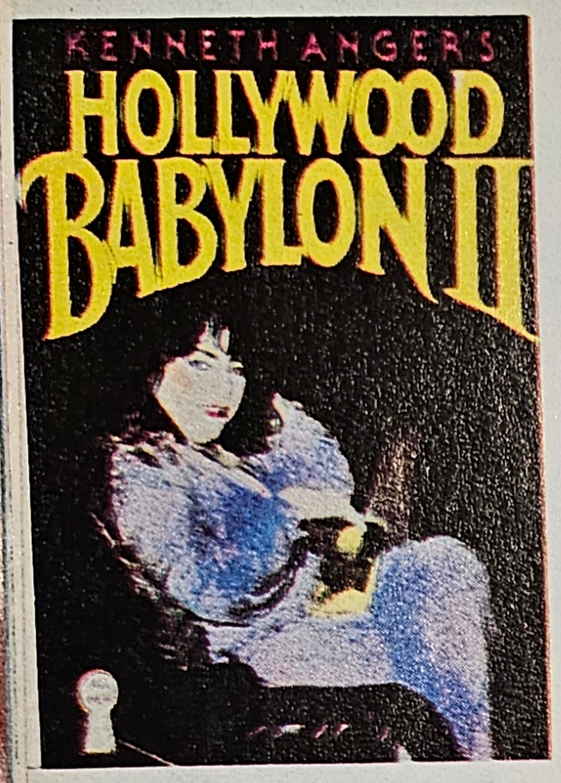
furniture, you name it. So when I saw those neon violins I pointed to them and said, "I want one." And the head prop man said "Hey, you're just a kid; you'll break it." I said, very seriously, "No, I'll keep it carefully for the rest of my life." And then Mickey said to the guy, "Go on, give the kid a violin. They'll never miss it." So he did give me the violin, and I have it to this day. It's stored in California, it's supposed to go into the Hollywood all of Fame. And it's the only one that survived the 60.



OUI: In the chapter "Odd Couples" you tell an amazing story about 'Rosebud' being William Randolph Hearst's nickname for Marion Davies' clitoris, and Herman Mankiewicz working that word repeatedly into the screenplay and storyline of *Citizen Kane*. He apparently was a welcome guest at one point at San Simeon (Hearst's castle home and party palace).

Anger: Sure, like quite a few other people, until they were crossed off the welcome list. He got fired at Columbia because he made a crack about Harry Cohn's (head of Columbia studios during the 1930s and '40s) asshole twitching. Harry Cohn had told a board meeting, "I know when it's a bad movie, when my ass starts twitching and I get squirmy in my seat." Which is really very logical advice. When you're aware that you're trapped in this chair, well, the movie's dragging or it's bad. So, Mankiewicz, smoking his cigar, made this crack: "Just think! The whole world is wired to Harry Cohn's asshole." Which was so brilliant; it cracked up the whole board meeting and Harry stood up and said, "You're fired. Get off the lot."

OUI: You end the *Rosebud* story by saying Hearst "wasn't a Texan. No guns were called for." Despite his rage he remained cool.

Anger: Yes...Orson Welles wasn't snuffed, nor was Mankiewicz. They were *boycotted*. It was very hard to find any theatre that would play *Citizen Kane*.

OUI: The story about Alfred Hitchcock watching Grace Kelly undress through a telescope from miles away, with her permission, is incredible. Can you reveal your source on that story?

Anger: Alfred Hitchcock. I was having lunch with Alfred, Alma (Hitchcock's wife) and Henri Langlois in Paris. It was the occasion where he presented the *Psycho* head, you know the shrivelled head of the mother to Henri for his museum. Alma knew all about it. This was Grace Kelly catering on one occasion to his eccentricity. I found it very touching that she would do that once. After all, the striptease was from a mile away and the whole thing was over in five minutes. It was one of the most memorable things in Hitchcock's life because he was an obsessive voyeur of scopophiliac. And basically, that's what he was because he considered himself so ugly, like Quasimodo the hunchback of Notre Dame. He had a terrific hangup about his looks, he thought he looked like a toad...and he did (laughs), frankly, he did! But after all, there are lots of women that are "starfuckers" and they'd say, "Gee whiz. I'm making it with Alfred Hitchcock," and they'd keep saying it over and over in their mind.

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OUI: In your "Odd Couples" chapter, there are a lot of photos with intriguing captions but no mention of the photos in the text. Was it heavily edited?

Anger: Oh, the text was four times longer and the team of libel lawyers at E.P. Dutton...

OUI: Just ate away at it?

Anger: They didn't eat away, they slashed it.

OUI: Were there lawsuits as a result of the first *Hollywood Babylon*?

Anger: Yes, there was a $30 million lawsuit filed by Gloria Swanson for defamation. It dragged on for two years before going to Federal Court in New York City. The judge read the brief, saw my photostat of Walter Winchell's column in which Gloria Swanson is quoted as saying, "Walter, how dare you defend Lana Turner, she's nothing but a tart." He read this one-page defense, looked at the photostat of the column, and said, "This case has no merit. Dismissed." And he rapped his gavel and that was the end of it. My bill came to 20 grand, for lawyer's fees.

OUI: The lawyers at Dutton obviously have given the new book the stamp of approval...

Anger: Well, those 331 pages, I have had to fight knockdown-drag-out battles...Certain stories were cut out, other ones I could use pictures but no text, and the idea is if you're hip enough to understand the pictures, you'll figure out the point.

OUI: But you don't foresee any lawsuits from this book.

Anger: Anyone who wants to sue me can, even if I say the gospel truth and I have the truth in a hundred affidavits. What can they do to me? Will they seize my Rudolph Valentino cigar box? In other words, I have my wealth in collectibles, not in cash.

OUI: Do you think the gossip mongers of the world can ever expect a *Hollywood Babylon III*?

Anger: Well, about every ten years I have to think up something that will start earning me some money. I do not work for anyone else; I have what I call an independent lifestyle. Which means I'm unmarried, I'm without ties, and I don't have to report to any office for a 9-to-5 job. I hope to God, I pray, that I never will have to, because my whole life has been devised as a way to avoid that. ■